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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the habits of isolation that teacher educators bring from previous lives as teachers, administrators, and students who have been part of typically individualistic and competitive K-12, undergraduate, and graduate schooling. The paper also addresses the lack of communication inside teacher education programs that isolates the instructors, teaching assistants, supervisors, and cross-campus department advisors. It is noted that reckoning with these issues is crucial to successful work in collaborative partnerships and that it is important that teacher educators address the stereotype of the "ivory tower" and the embarrassment of disparagements of teacher education curriculum as being too remote from the practical reality of the classroom. There is a need to conduct honest dialogue about the tension between teacher educators and school people, in which school personnel see themselves as dealing with reality and see teacher educators as inhabiting a scholastic retreat from practical problems. (JD)

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Cooperation Starts Inside Schools of Education: Teacher Educators as Collaborators

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Cooperation Starts Inside Schools of Education: Teacher Educators as Collaborators

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Introduction

Proponents of partnerships between schools and universities assume that students, teachers, and university faculty will benefit from associations that combine and enlarge the resources of both institutions. However, collaborative arrangements bring to the surface our unfamiliarity with cooperation, and the complexity of people working together.

This paper will explore the habits of isolation that teacher educators bring with us from our previous lives as teachers, administrators, and students who have been part of typically individualistic and competitive K-12, undergraduate, and graduate schooling. The paper will also address the lack of communication inside teacher education programs that isolates instructors, teaching assistants, supervisors, and cross-campus department advisors. Reckoning with these issues is crucial to successful work in collaborative partnerships. It is important that teacher educators address the stereotype of the "ivory tower" and the embarrassment of the ongoing references to a "mickey mouse" education curriculum. We need to conduct honest dialogue about

the tension between ourselves and school people, in which they see themselves as "in the trenches" or "in the real world," and see teacher educators inhabiting "fantasy land."

We come to this topic drawing upon our collective experiences as students, supervisors, administrators, and faculty in teacher education; utilizing a research project at the University of Massachusetts that is exploring cooperative learning; and from our mutual attempts to bring collaborative work and community to our own classrooms. We are concerned that in our own day-to-day interactions theory remains detached from practice (Dewey, 1965).

Teaching as We've Been Taught

Most of the literature on cooperative learning focuses on K-12 students, understanding that work in classrooms must be done to help those students unlearn previously internalized competitive and individualistic "instincts" so they can adjust to new, cooperative structures (Aaronsohn, 1986, Aronson, 1978; Holmes Group, 1986; Holt, 1984; Johnson & Johnson, 1982; Lortie, 1975; Oakes, 1985; Sarason, 1982; Slavin, 1983; Task Force on Teaching, 1986; Wittrock, 1986). These studies acknowledge the fact that traditional teaching actively discourages students from talking to one another, from problem solving with each other as resources, from making meaning interdependently (Brandes & Ginnis, 1986; Friere, 1982; Powell, Farrar, & Cohen, 1985). Almost all of the teachers in American public schools are

successful products of that same kind of traditional teaching. Some of the literature on cooperative learning examines the initial reluctance of teachers, particularly secondary teachers, to try to use cooperative learning activities in their classrooms (Jackson, 1968; Stewart, 1986). Our research connects that reluctance with strong traditional habits of teacher-dominance and student isolation.

Some studies have focused on the isolation of K-12 teachers from each other in their buildings. Lortie (1975) referred to the "egg-carton" classroom. These studies propose that teachers must collaborate, for their own professional development and for the good of the children they teach.

Little of the research literature on either teacher isolation or cooperative learning in the K-12 classroom deals with the way teacher educators continue to perpetuate the notion that our role is to transmit yet another linear body of knowledge for which we alone are responsible. And, when alternative approaches are employed, they typically occur inside of our clique of colleagues not in collaboration with other teacher educators or school teachers, so it is often collectively assumed that alternative teaching methods lack rigor, standards, or connections to K-12 classrooms. With this lack of mutual communication and respect we often hear others and ourselves saying or thinking, "What I am working on is significant. What you are working on must be less significant and not all that

good." And the subjective nature of evaluating cooperative endeavors often discourages "counting" it as a significant portion of a grade-driven process.

Collaboration Requires Cooperation

Current collaborative efforts that require the linkage between faculty inside schools of education, cross-campus departments, school teachers/administrators, business partners, etc...bring to the surface our unfamiliarity with cooperation. Early meetings are often filled with misinterpretations, turf protection, and backbiting. The internal variables that operate to keep teachers at a safe distance from other teachers, and especially school people from University people, are ones we learned quite systematically in the hierarchical and competitive structures of our own traditional schooling. There, people who are now teachers and teacher educators were taught not to trust one another, not to see each other as resources, not to expect exciting ideas from each other. We have learned to mistake isolation for autonomy, and to identify talking to each other as cheating or wasting time. Creative teaming approaches and successful partnerships are exposing and contradicting the myth that cooperation is not possible or useful, but in too few and themselves isolated environments (Jones & Maloy, 1988). Without bringing these factors to full consciousness, the cycle of isolation and non-cooperation continues. Department members do not know what goes on in colleagues' courses, graduate students

are employed but not empowered, or faculty meetings degenerate into administrivia or argument over rules or style without time or patience for substance.

Habits of Isolation in Teacher Education

Most of our habits of isolation in teacher education stem from our lifelong work as students and teachers. We learned well the competitive survival-of-the-fittest style that predominates education in this century. Teachers at all levels have little time or encouragement to plan together, to discuss current issues or trends outside of our professional organization's meetings, to talk together positively about how students can be served. Lipsky (1980) discusses the "coping strategies" we each develop in isolation from one another and that reinforce our mistrust of each other. Most of our experiences in faculty meetings or committees is so frustrating that we often participate under psychological protest or not at all.

Scarcity of resources, especially new funds have turned segments of schools of education against themselves in a competitive fight for survival. This institutional mechanism of infighting is often willingly and unwillingly allowed to occur by administrators as a way to deflect animosity. This practice creates personal tensions over issues that would not take place in times of growth. For example, overworked secondary teacher education programs are forced to compete with overworked elementary programs for shrinking funds. At the same time,

faculty are being asked to work with school and business colleagues to develop partnerships to improve schools and teacher education. These new initiatives take nurturing time and enormous amounts of energy to plan, design, and implement, yet a large portion of that time and energy must be spent in internal bickering over priorities, justifying the new partnerships through the committee processes, lobbying for teaching assistants, begging for travel reimbursements, etc... The infighting that takes place over the small details and large rationales for the new initiatives can stymie the positive energy that exists to try new ventures.

A large part of the failure of cooperation inside schools of education relates to communication. Just as most teachers in schools know little about what takes place in their neighbors' classrooms, education faculty spend little time working together to synchronize their courses, integrate the important feedback of their cadre of graduate students, or reporting on teaching practices that are successful or not. This behavior mimics our behavior as teachers in schools but contradicts both our intuitive desires and research findings.

Our unwillingness to attempt cooperation in the classroom allows us to fail a majority of students by teaching only what we feel comfortable trying, which is usually how we were taught. Higher education's lecture oriented, "take a number" style perpetuates the norm of teachers as expert, "top-down," don't-

ask-questions-or-they'll-slow-us-down attitude. And teacher educators who try new ideas regularly have not successfully communicated or have not been asked to contribute their emphasis of learning and teaching or of facilitating instead of lecturing. By keeping a safe distance from one another, the input of junior faculty, graduate students, and participating teachers can receive only lip-service in teacher education program evaluations and reform. Without an effort to thoughtfully reflect upon the complex and appropriately inefficient nature of teacher education, we continue to perpetuate the trend to perceive education courses as less academic than subject area department offerings.

Accepting Multiple Realities

Working together toward improving schools is not only the trendy topic of this reform era. It is an exciting, ambiguous way to blend resources and create unanticipated positive outcomes that can improve opportunities for all students. Cooperation does not mean relinquishing the vital roles of professional schools of education. In fact, it calls for a simultaneous colleague and critic responsibility that honors the work of schools from an informed perspective, but challenges them to move forward to better meet the needs of students now not reaching their potential. This responsibility of teacher educators requires better cooperation from within starts by accepting and understanding the multiple realities that exist in any

organization (Jones & Maloy, 1988; Schutz, 1967).

Ideas for Working Together

We often see the opportunities to work together as more work rather than the possibility of different work. We think that 5 + 1 = 7 when it is very possible that by knowing more about each other's work 5 + 1 = 5. It is our previous experience in unsuccessful groups and our successful training in individualistic style that continues the predominance of individual rather than team efforts.

As part of the session on March 3 we will ask participants to engage in collective discussion about the difficulties of overcoming the habits that impede our working together, and the resulting fragmentation that of much of what we do in teacher education programs.

Strategies that we propose for improving internal cooperation require three elements that draw about the work of Sarason (1982):

1) faculty have to want to work together. Those that don't cannot "jam" those that do. In some cases, senior faculty or administrators have been allowed to create an institutional isolation standard that is not appropriate for teacher education in the 1990's.

2) faculty have to be willing to be flexible about uncertain and ambiguous linkages that may challenge old ways of doing things, not just use them to confirm what we already believe.

3) administrators have to create a cooperative environment

and reward those that do cooperate with recognition and resources to carry out new program ideas.

Extended retreats have been used as a way to air views about program improvement in the time and space to share views thoughtfully. Large amounts of energy gets created during these special events that has difficulty being infused into the culture after the retreat spirit is lost in the day-to-day tired of the semester. More permanent processing meetings must take place as a regular part of the schedule. Those of us that have been part of such regular efforts to share our work regularly feel frustrated that we spend too much time talking leaving not enough time to "do it." Yet, without regular revolving small group meetings to share our work the context is lost. Our university advantage is that we are supposed to take that time. Perhaps our previous experience in such forums again blocks our ability to conceive a positive situation where we can share in a small enough forum to be heard, but with a different enough mix of people that we are not just talking to the people we already know agree with us. The Cincinnati Bengals of the National Football League floundered a year ago, This summer in training camp the coach mixed things up, changing old roommates, putting new players with veterans, Blacks with Whites, offense with defense. He broke the old norms in an effort to get people to know one another. Cooperation as a team was what he believed was the difference between a winning season and another mediocre one. The talent on the team was championship caliber. Now they had to

work together. Players balked at first at the reshaping of their hamster-like norms but now admit their Super Bowl season turned as they began to know one another better and respected each other's work more. Much of our lack of cooperation stems from our White male dominant higher education culture. We might learn from this example of another male dominant world in the NFL, reorganizing the people emphasis of our work to center on getting to know each other and utilizing our differences in style and substance as strengths rather than levers for division and ongoing "sameness" in what we do.

We can learn to negotiate inevitable differences of perspective rather than avoiding them by distancing from each other. What we propose for teacher educators is the modeling of cooperation within our teacher education programs that must be part of all our collaborative efforts.

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